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Abstract

Many years ago, while studying in Paris as a novice postgraduate, I was invited to accompany a friend to a seminar with Jacques Derrida. I leapt at the chance even though I was only just learning French. Although I tried hard to follow the discussion, the extent of my participation was probably signing the attendance sheet. Afterwards, caught up on the edges of a small crowd of acolytes in the foyer as we waited out a sudden rainstorm, Derrida turned to me and charmingly complimented me on my forethought in predicting rain, pointing to my umbrella. Flustered, I garbled something in broken French about how I never forgot my umbrella, how desolated I was that he had mislaid his, and would he perhaps desire mine? After a small silence, where he and the other students side-eyed me warily, he declined. For years I dined on this story of meeting a celebrity academic, cheerfully re-enacting my linguistic ineptitude.

Keywords

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Double Quote Unquote: Scholarly Attribution as (a) Speculative Play in the Remix Academy

Ruth Walker

Abstract

Many years ago, while studying in Paris as a novice postgraduate, I was invited to accompany a friend to a seminar with Jacques Derrida. I leapt at the chance even though I was only just learning French. Although I tried hard to follow the discussion, the extent of my participation was probably signing the attendance sheet. Afterwards, caught up on the edges of a small crowd of acolytes in the foyer as we waited out a sudden rainstorm, Derrida turned to me and charmingly complimented me on my forethought in predicting rain, pointing to my umbrella. Flustered, I garbled something in broken French about how I never forgot my umbrella, how desolated I was that he had mislaid his, and would he perhaps desire mine? After a small silence, where he and the other students side-eyed me warily, he declined. For years I dined on this story of meeting a celebrity academic, cheerfully re-enacting my linguistic ineptitude.

Nearly a decade later I was taken aback when I overheard a lecturer in philosophy at the University of Sydney re-telling my encounter as a witty anecdote, where an early career academic teased Derrida with a masterful quip, quoting back to him his own attention to someone else's quote. It turned out that [Spurs](#), one of Derrida's more obscure early essays, employs an extended riff on an inexplicable citation found in inverted commas in the margins of Nietzsche's papers: "*J'ai oublié mon parapluie*" ("I have forgotten my umbrella"). My clumsy response to a polite enquiry was recast in a process of Chinese whispers in my academic community as a snappy spur-of-the-moment witticism. This re-telling didn't just selectively edit my encounter, but remixed it with a meta-narrative that I had myself referenced, albeit unknowingly.

My ongoing interest in the more playful breaches of scholarly conventions of quotation and attribution can be traced back to this incident, where my own presentation of an academic self was appropriated and remixed from fumbler to quipster. I've also been struck throughout my teaching career by the seeming disconnect between the stringent academic rules for referencing and citation and the everyday strategies of appropriation that are inherent to popular remix culture. I'm taking the opportunity in this paper to reflect on the practice of scholarly quotation itself, before examining some recent creative provocations to the academic 'author' situated inventively at the crossroad between scholarly convention and remix culture.

Early in his own teaching career at Oxford University [Lewis Carroll](#), wrote to his younger siblings describing the importance of maintaining his dignity as a new tutor. He outlines the distance his college was at pains to maintain between teachers and their students: "otherwise, you know, they are not humble enough". Carroll playfully describes the set-up of a tutor sitting at his desk, behind closed doors and without access to today's communication technologies, relying on a series of college 'scouts' to convey information down corridors and staircases to the confused student waiting for instruction below. The lectures, according to Carroll, went something like this:

Tutor: What is twice three?
 Scout: What's a rice-tree?
 Sub-scout: When is ice free?
 Sub-sub-scout: What's a nice fee??
 Student (*timidly*): Half a guinea.
 Sub-sub-scout: Can't forge any!
 Sub-scout: Ho for jinny!
 Scout: Don't be a ninny!
 Tutor (*looking offended, tries another question*): Divide a hundred by twelve.
 Scout: Provide wonderful bells!
 Sub-scout: Go ride under it yourself!
 Sub-sub-scout: Deride the dunderhead elf!
 Pupil (*surprised*): What do you mean?
 Sub-sub-scout: Doings between!
 Sub-scout: Blue is the screen!
 Scout: Soup tureen!

And so the lecture proceeds...

Carroll's parody of academic miscommunication and misquoting was reproduced by Pierre Bourdieu at the opening of the book *Academic Discourse* to illustrate the failures of pedagogical practice in higher education in the mid 1960s, when he found scholarly language relied on codes that were "destined to dazzle rather than to enlighten" (3). Bourdieu et al found that students struggled to reproduce appropriately scholarly discourse and were constrained to write in a badly understood and poorly mastered language, finding reassurance in what he called a 'rhetoric of despair': "through a kind of incantatory or sacrificial rite, they try to call up and reinstate the tropes, schemas or words which to them distinguish professorial language" (4). The result was bad writing that karaoke-ed a pseudo academic discourse, accompanied by a habit of thoughtlessly patching together other peoples' words and phrases.

Such sloppy quoting activities of course invite the scholarly taboo of plagiarism or its extreme opposite, hypercitation. Elsewhere, Jacques Derrida developed an important theory of [citationality and language](#), but it is intriguing to note his own considerable unease with conventional acknowledgement practices, of quoting and being quoted:

I would like to spare you the tedium, the waste of time, and the subservience that always accompany the classic pedagogical procedures of forging links, referring back to past premises or arguments, justifying one's own trajectory, method, system, and more or less skilful transitions, re-establishing continuity, and so on. These are but some of the imperatives of classical pedagogy with which, to be sure, one can never break once and for all. Yet, if you were to submit to them rigorously, they would very soon reduce you to silence, tautology and tiresome repetition. (*The Ear of the Other*, 3)

This weariness with a procedural hyper-focus on referencing conventions underlines Derrida's disquiet with the self-protecting, self-promoting and self-justifying practices that bolster pedagogical tradition and yet inhibit real scholarly work, and risk silencing the authorial voice.

Today, remix offers new life to quoting. Media theorist [Lev Manovich](#) resisted the notion that the practice of 'quotation' was the historical precedent for remixing, aligning it instead to the authorship practice of music 'sampling' made possible by new electronic and digital technology. [Eduardo Navas](#) agrees that sampling is the key element that makes the act of remixing possible, but links its principles not just to music but to the preoccupation with reading and writing as an extended cultural practice beyond textual writing onto all forms of media (8). A crucial point for Navas is that while remix appropriates and reworks its source material, it relies on the practice of citation to work properly: too close to the original means the remix risks being dismissed as derivative, but at the same time the remixer can't rely on a source always being known or recognised (7). In other words, the conceptual strategies of remix must rely on some form of referencing or citation of the ideas it sources.

It is inarguable that advances in digital technologies have expanded the capacity of scholars to search, cut/copy & paste, collate and link to their research sources. New theoretical and methodological frameworks are being developed to take account of these changing conditions of academic work. For instance, Annette Markham proposes a '[remix methodology](#)' for contemplative enquiry, arguing that remix is a powerful tool for thinking about an interpretive and adaptive research practice that takes account of the complexity of contemporary cultural contexts.

In a similar vein [Cheré Harden Blair](#) has used remix as a theoretical framework to grapple with the issue of plagiarism in the postmodern classroom. If, following Roland Barthes, all writing is "a tissue of quotations drawn from innumerable centers of culture" (146), and if all writing is therefore rewriting, then punishing

students for plagiarism becomes problematic. Blair argues that since scholarly writing has become a mosaic of digital and textual productions, then teaching must follow suit, especially since teaching, as a dynamic, shifting and intertextual enterprise, is more suited to the digital revolution than traditional, fixed writing (175). She proposes that teachers provide a space in which remixing, appropriation, patch-writing and even piracy could be allowable, even useful and productive: "a space in which the line is blurry not because students are ignorant of what is right or appropriate, or because digital text somehow contains inherent temptations to plagiarise, but because digital media has, in fact, blurred the line" (183).

The clashes between remix and scholarly rules of attribution are directly addressed by the pedagogical provocations of conceptual poet [Kenneth Goldsmith](#), who has developed a program of 'uncreative writing' at the University of Pennsylvania, where, among other plagiaristic tasks, he forces students to transcribe whole passages from books, or to download essays from online paper mills and defend them as their own, marking down students who show a 'shred of originality'. In his own writing and performances, which depend almost exclusively on strategies of appropriation, plagiarism and recontextualisation of often banal sources like traffic reports, Goldsmith says that he is working to de-familiarise normative structures of language. For Goldsmith, reframing language into another context allows it to become new again, so that "we don't need the new sentence, the old sentence re-framed is good enough".

Goldsmith argues for the role of the contemporary academic and creative writer as an intelligent agent in the management of masses of information. He describes his changing perception of his own work: "I used to be an artist, then I became a poet; then a writer. Now when asked, I simply refer to myself as a word processor" (Perloff 147). For him, what is of interest to the twenty-first century is not so much the quote that 'rips' or tears words out of their original context, but finding ways to make new 'holes' out of the accumulations, filterings and remixing of existing words and sentences.

Another extraordinary example of the blurring of lines between text, author and the discursive peculiarities of digital media can be found in Jonathan Lethem's essay 'An Ecstasy of Influence: A Plagiarism', which first appeared in [Harpers Magazine](#) in 2007. While this essay is about the topic of plagiarism, it is itself plagiarized, composed of quotes that have been woven seamlessly together into a composite whole. Although Lethem provides a key at the end with a list of his sources, he has removed in-text citations and quotation marks, even while directly discussing the practices of mis-quotation and mis-attribution throughout the essay itself. Towards the end of the essay can be found the paragraph:

Any text is woven entirely with citations, references, echoes, cultural languages, which cut across it through and through in a vast stereophony. The citations that go to make up a text are anonymous, untraceable, and yet *already read*; they are quotations without inverted commas. The kernel, the soul — let us go further and say the substance, the bulk, the actual and valuable material of all human utterances — is plagiarism.

By necessity, by proclivity, and by delight, we all quote. Neurological study has lately shown that memory, imagination, and consciousness itself is stitched, quilted, pastiched. If we cut-and-paste ourselves, might we not forgive it of our artworks? (68)

Overall, Lethem's self-reflexive pro-plagiarism essay reminds the reader not only of how ideas in literature have been continuously recycled, quoted, appropriated and remixed, but of how open-source cultures are vital for the creation of new works.

Lethem (re)produces rather than authors a body of text that is haunted by ever present/absent quotation marks and references. Zara Dinnen suggests that Lethem's essay, like almost all contemporary texts produced on a computer, is a provocation to once again re-theorise the notion of the author, as not a rigid point of origin but instead "a relay of alternative and composite modes of production" (212), extending Manovich's notion of the role of author in the digital age of being perhaps closest to that of a DJ. But Lethem's essay, however surprising and masterfully intertextual, was produced and disseminated as a linear 'static' text.

On the other hand, Mark Amerika's *remixthebook* project first started out as a series of theoretical performances on his [Professor VJ blog](#) and was then extended into a multitrack composition of "applied remixology" that features sampled phrases and ideas from a range of artistic, literary, musical, theoretical and philosophical sources. Wanting his project to be received not as a book but as a hybridised publication and performance art project that appears in both print and digital forms, *remixthebook* was simultaneously published in a prestigious university press and a website that works as an online hub and teaching tool to test out the theories. In this way, Amerika expands the concept of writing to include multimedia forms composed for both networked environments and also experiments with what he terms "creative risk management" where the artist, also a scholar and a teacher, is "willing to drop all intellectual pretence and turn his theoretical agenda into (a) speculative play" (xi). He explains his process halfway through the print book:

Other times we who create innovative works of remix art are fully self-conscious of the rival lineage we spring forth from and knowingly take on other remixological styles just to see what happens when we move inside other writers' bodies (of work)

This is when remixologically inhabiting the spirit of another writer's stylistic tendencies or at least the subconsciously imagined writerly gestures that illuminate his or her live spontaneous performance feels more like an embodied praxis

In some ways this all seems so obvious to me: I mean what is a writer anyway but a simultaneous and continuous fusion of remixologically inhabited bodies of work? (109)

Amerika mashes up the jargon of academic writing with avant-pop forms of digital rhetoric in order to "move inside other writers' bodies (of work)" in order to test out his theoretical agenda in an "embodied praxis" at the same time that he shakes up the way that contemporary scholarship itself is performed.

The *remixthebook* project inevitably recalls one of the great early-twentieth century plays with scholarly quotation, Walter Benjamin's [The Arcades Project](#). Instead of avoiding conventional quoting, footnoting and referencing, these are the very fabric of Benjamin's sprawling project, composed entirely of quotes drawn from nineteenth century philosophy and literature. This early scholarly 'remixing' project has been described as bewildering and oppressive, but which others still find relevant and inspirational. Marjorie Perloff, for instance, finds the 'passages' in Benjamin's arcades have "become the digital passages we take through websites and YouTube videos, navigating our way from one Google link to another and over the bridges provided by our favourite search engines and web pages" (49).

For Benjamin, the process of collecting quotes was addictive. Hannah Arendt describes his habit of carrying little black notebooks in which "he tirelessly entered in the form of quotations what daily living and reading netted him in the way of 'pearls' and 'coral'. On occasion he read from them aloud, showed them around like items from a choice and precious collection" (45). A similar practice of everyday hypercitation can be found in the contemporary Australian performance artist Danielle Freakley's project, [The Quote Generator](#). For what was intended in 2006 to be a three year project, but which is still ongoing, Freakley takes the delirious pleasure of finding and fitting the perfect quote to fit an occasion to an extreme. Unlike Benjamin, Freakley didn't collect and collate quotes, she then relied on them to navigate her way through her daily interactions. As *The Quote Generator*, Freakley spoke only in quotations drawn from film, literature and popular culture, immediately following each quote with its correct in-text reference, familiar to academic writers as the 'author/date' citation system.

The awkwardness and seeming artificiality of even short exchanges with someone who responds only in quotes might be bewildering enough, but the inclusion of the citation after the quote maddeningly interrupts and, at the same time, adds another metalevel to a conversation where even the simple platitude 'thank you' might be followed by an attribution to 'Deep Throat 1972'. Longer exchanges become increasingly overwhelming, as Freakley's piling of quote on quote, and sometimes repeating quotes, demands an attentive listener, as is evident in a 2008 interview with Andrew Denton on the ABC's *Enough Rope*:

Andrew Denton's [Enough Rope](#) (2008)

Denton: So, you've been doing this for three years??
 Freakley: Yes, Optus 1991
 Denton: How do people respond to you speaking in such an unnatural way?
 Freakley: It changes, David Bowie 1991. On the streets AKA Breakdance 1984, most people that I know think that I am crazy, Billy Thorpe 1972, a nigger like me is going insane, Cyprus Hill 1979, making as much sense as a Japanese instruction manual, Red Dwarf 1993.

Video documentation of Freakley's encounters with unsuspecting members of the public reveal how frustrating the inclusion of 'spoken' references can be, let alone how taken aback people are on realising they never get Freakley's own words, but are instead receiving layers of quotations. The frustration can quickly turn hostile (Denton at one point tells Freakley to "shut up") or can prove contaminatory, as people attempt to match or one-up her quotes (see [Cook's interview](#) 8). Apparently, when Freakley continued her commitment to the performance at a Perth Centerlink, the staff sent her to a psychiatrist and she was diagnosed with an obsessive-compulsive disorder, then prescribed medication ([Schwartzkoff](#) 4).

While Benjamin's *The Arcades Project* invites the reader to scroll through its pages as a kind of textual flaneur, Freakley herself becomes a walking and talking word processor, extending the possibilities of Amerika's "embodied praxis" in an inescapable remix of other people's words and phrases. At the beginning of the project, Freakley organised a card collection of quotes categorised into possible conversation topics, and devised a 'harness' for easy access.

Danielle Freakley's

Image: Danielle Freakley's [The Quote Generator](#) harness

Eventually, however, Freakley was able to rely on her own memory of an astounding number of quotations, becoming a "near mechanical vessel" ([Gottlieb](#) 2009), or, according to her own manifesto, a "regurgitation library to live by":

The Quote Generator reads, and researches as it speaks. The Quote Generator is both the reader and composer/editor. The Quote Generator is not an actor spouting lines on a stage. The Quote Generator assimilates others lines into everyday social life ... The Quote Generator, tries to find its own voice, an understanding through throbbing collations of others, constantly gluttonously referencing. Much academic writing quotes/references ravenously. New things cannot be said without constant referral, acknowledgement to what has been already, the intricate detective work in the barking of the academic dog.

By her unrelenting appropriation and regurgitating of quotations, Freakley uses sampling as a technique for an extended performance that draws attention to the remixology of everyday life. By replacing conversation with a hyper-insistence on quotes and their simultaneous citation, she draws attention to the artificiality and inescapability of the 'codes' that make up not just ordinary conversations, but also conventional academic discourse, what she calls the "barking of the academic dog".

Freakley's performance has pushed the scholarly conventions of quoting and referencing to their furthest extreme, in what has been described by [Daine Singer](#) as a kind of "endurance art" that relies, in large part, on an antagonistic relationship to its audience. In his now legendary 1969 "Double Session" seminar, Derrida, too, experimented with the pedagogical performance of the (re)producing author, teasing his earnest academic audience. It is reported that the seminar began in a dimly lit room lined with blackboards covered with quotations that Derrida, for a while, simply "pointed to in silence" (177). In this seminar, Derrida put into play notions that can be understood to inform remix practices just as much as they do deconstruction: the author, originality, mimesis, imitation, representation and reference. Scholarly conventions, perhaps particularly the quotation practices that insist on the circulation of rigid codes of attribution, and are defended by increasingly out-of-date understandings of contemporary research, writing and teaching practices, are ripe to be played with. Remix offers an expanded discursive framework to do this in creative and entertaining ways.

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